

Dad's plans to expand plant in Meadville

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MEADVILLE -- Fidos and Fluffies across the land are eating more of Dad's Pet Products, and that's helping to feed Meadville's economy.

"We've been on quite a roll here, pretty much doubling our business in the last three or four years," said Doug Lang, executive vice president of sales and marketing for the family-owned company. "As owners I'd say we are very optimistic as to the future."

Optimistic enough for a major upgrade and expansion of its local manufacturing plant, which will bring an increase in jobs.

The company plans to replace the equipment in its dry dog food manufacturing plant and add to another building that will increase capacity and allow for new product lines and add up to 35 new jobs.

Dad's currently employs about 250 in Meadville and another 150 at its Warren pet treats plant.

"We want to have the equipment updated and up and running -- you can call that the Meadville enhancement -- by January of next year," said Paul Johnson, Dad's director of operations.

The addition to the second building could come as early as December or as late as June of 2007, he said.

Longer term, the company is looking to construct a new warehouse and distribution facility.

Dad's recent growth has come in part through expanding distribution of pet foods carrying its brand from 13 to 24 states over the past few years and by entering and steadily growing its private-label business, producing and packaging pet foods for others, Lang said.

It's all part of the company's efforts to reach more families and their pets, and there are a lot of them to reach.

There are 73.9 million dogs in America and 90.5 million cats, according to a 2005 survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturer Association.

The association estimated that Americans spent \$35.9 billion on their pets in 2005, including \$14.5 billion for food.

"Those statistics point to opportunities for us in a big way," Lang said. "The pie continues to expand. ... The playing field is huge for us."